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AUTHOR Hanford, George H.; Taylor, Daniel B.
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ABSTRACT

One of our nation's educational triumphs is that admission to college has been brought within the reach of a majority of our high school graduates. Yet inadequate preparation often deprives students of this opportunity. Their stunted hopes are a major reason for growing naitonal concern about the quality of education in our schools. The College Board is reacting to this concern through its Educational EQuality Project. Under its banner, statements of seven Basic Academic Competencies and six Basic Academic Subjects have been published in a document entitled "Academic Preparation For College: What Students Need to Know And Be Able to Do." It describes what students need to know in English, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign languages, and the arts, and what students need to be able to do in terms of reading, writing, speaking and listening, doing mathematics, understanding computers, and studying. For those concerned with testing these statements provide an intriguing challenge. Examinations focused on the desired outcomes could determine the secondary school curriculum. But that would be an anathema in our non-system of education. And so we must wait until persuasion has begun to work and then adapt our tests gradually to the changing curriculum. (Author/PN)

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Abstract

What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do On Leavin" School for College*

One of our nation's educational triumphs is that admission to college, once the privilege of a few, has been brought within the reach of a majority of our high school graduates. Yet inadequate preparation often deprives students of this opportunity. Their stunted hopes are a major reason for growing national concern about the quality of education in our schools. The College Board is reacting to this concern through its Educational EQuality Project. Under its banner statements of seven Basic Academic Competencies and six Basic Academic Subjects have been published in a document entitled Academic Preparation For College: What Students Need to Know And Be Able to Do. It describes what they need to know in English, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign languages and the arts and what they need to be able to do in terms of reading, writing, speaking and listening, doing mathematics, understanding computers, and studying.

For those concerned with testing these statements provide an intriguing challenge. Examinations focused on the desired outcomes could determine the secondary school curriculum. But that would be dictation, which is an anathema in our non-system of education. And so we must wait until persuasion has begun to work and then adapt our tests gradually to the changing curriculum.

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*Remarks prepared for delivery by George H. Hanford, President, and Daniel B. Taylor, Senior Vice President, The College Board, at 9th Annual IAEA Conference, Blantyre, Malawi, June 13-20, 1983.

What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do On Leaving School for College*

The paper I am about to present is essentially the same one that George Hanford would have delivered if it had been possible for him to attend. But he wants you to know that, while it bears his name as author, the contents of the message, as you will discover, were not conceived by him but by many school and university teachers. Thus, they constitute not a message from the U.S. Department of Education or indeed from the College Board, but instead a message from the classrooms of the United States. As such, they deal primarily with the first part of the theme of this conference: "Assessing Expected Outcomes of Education."

George chose to deal with this subject because it is the more unique aspect of the Board's involvement. And it is unique because of the way education is organized in the United States. We have no central, federal or national agency which defines what should be taught in the schools. Rather we have 50 states each with its own educational structure and most of them are separately organized to

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deal with elementary and secondary education on the one hand and university education on the other. Yet the requirements with respect to curriculum even at this level are minimal and the actual control of what is taught rests with more than 15,116 separate, locally elected school boards around the country In those circumstances, changes or improvements in the curriculum must be accomplished by consensus and persuasion rather than by dictate or decree. It is with that process of consensus-building and persuasion with which this paper deals.

One of our nation's great educational triumphs is that since the middle of this century admission to college, once the privilege of a few, has been brought within the reach of a majority of high school graduates. Yet inadequate preparation in effect deprives students of a fair chance to take advantage of this opportunity.

In recent years, many college entrants have not had the knowledge and skills needed for higher education. Many have been severely limited in their choice of college or have been unable to pursue their choice of program. Many inadequately prepared college students have dropped out in frustration or have failed their courses. Many who did graduate had such poor records that they could not go on to graduate or professional study.

These stunted hopes are a major reason for growing national concern about the quality of education in our schools. Adding to that

concern is the fact that many other students do not complete their high school education and cannot even aspire to college. Taken together, these are powerful arguments for mounting a major national effort to improve the quality of education in our secondary schools. The College Board is taking part in this national effort through its Educational EQuality Project and has begun by offering a basis for a central aspect of this effort: improving academic or college preparatory education. It is being mounted with the premise that, in order to improve preparation for college, the necessary outcomes of high school study must be identified: the knowledge and skills needed to obtain the full benefits of higher education.

To identify the academic preparation needed for college in the coming years, the College Board turned to teachers themselves. It sought the best judgments of hundreds of educators at high schools and colleges throughout the nation. In doing so, the Board was playing a familiar role. It is made up of more than 2,500 institutions of higher and secondary education. Since 1900 its member institutions have been working together to help students make the transition from high school to college.

In 1980 the College Board made an explicit commitment to working throughout the following decade to strengthen the academic preparation of all students for college. The Educational EQuality Project is the means by which the Board is carrying out this commitment. Both the

"E" and the "Q" are capitalized in the name of the project to indicate its intertwined emphases on quality and equality, on strengthening the academic preparation of all potential college entrants.

The initial guidance and advice that led to the Educational EQuality Project came from a group of distinguished educators and friends of education who met in September of 1980. Then more than 200 high school and college teachers serving on the Board's many committees and on its Council on Academic Affairs responded to questionnaires and participated in meetings devoted to rethinking the subject-matter preparation that would best equip students for the most selective colleges. At the same time, the Board's Advisory Panel on Minority Concerns focused attention on the broad academic competencies needed by students entering all colleges. Seven "urban dialogues" involving schools and colleges that serve large numbers of inner-city students worked out descriptions of these skills.

These strands came together in St. Louis, Missouri, in May of 1981. A broadly representative symposium of educators met to consider both the competencies and subject-matter descriptions. The Symposium worked out the Basic Academic Competencies, which were subsequently published and which have received wide attention from educators and policy makers. They already have exercised substantial influence on curricular activities and on state and local education policy. Their relevance to employment has been established in dialogues with representatives of business and industry.

The most significant result of the St. Louis symposium was agreement that both the competencies and the subject areas should be used to define the preparation needed by entrants of all four-year and two-year institutions of postsecondary education. The Board's Academic Advisory Committees and its Council on Academic Affairs subsequently revised the subject-matter descriptions. In the spring of 1982 they were submitted for comment to professional associations in the various fields and to 24 dialogues of college and high school teachers held in various parts of the country. All this commentary was drawn together in a statement of the Basic Academic Subjects.

The statements of the six Basic Academic Competencies and the six Basic Academic Subjects were then combined this past spring in a document entitled "Academic Preparation For College: What Students Need To Know And Be Able To Do." Thus, Academic Preparation for College presents a comprehensive description of the knowledge and skills needed by all college entrants. It describes what they need to learn in six Basic Academic Subjects that provide the specific knowledge and skills on which college-level study is based. It describes what they need to learn in six Basic Academic Competencies that are general skills necessary for effective work in all subjects. And it presents an additional statement on the newly emerging need for computer competency.

Learning the Basic Academic Subjects depends on the Basic Academic Competencies. At the same time, learning the Basic Academic Subjects further develops those competencies. Adequate preparation for college involves a coherent, cumulative pattern of learning.

Academic Preparation for College focuses on what students learn. Students are not born with the Basic Academic Competencies. They develop these competencies as a result of education and practice. Likewise, the Basic Academic Subjects are described as the outcomes of student learning. They are not descriptions of high school curricula -- of how this learning should be provided.

What students need to learn in high school is approached from the perspective of what is necessary for effective learning in college. Academic Preparation for College does not attempt to describe the knowledge and skills essential for those who, for whatever reason, do not choose to prepare for college. Discussions with leaders of business and industry confirm, however, that much of the learning described here also can be valuable to students going directly into the world of work. Moreover, although this learning is needed for college, it can engage and reward students in itself, over and above any other goal.

The learning outcomes described are rigorous as well as comprehensive. Not every participant in framing these descriptions

insists that every detail of the learning outcomes is essential. They are in general, however, what the high school and college teachers who worked out these descriptions believe all college entrants need to take full advantage of higher education.

All colleges probably would prefer their entering students to have this pattern of preparation. Not every college will insist that all entering students have all of this learning -- though most will expect them to acquire it before undertaking further study or in the course of their college career. Some colleges will expect more at the outset.

There are high schools that already provide some students with the knowledge and skills outlined here. The goal, however, is to provide quality preparation for as many college entrants as possible.

No attempt has been made to define the level of difficulty or the degree of sophistication that any one school or college should expect of its students. Obviously, different schools and colleges are likely to establish their own definitions in this regard.

In short, Academic Preparation for College is an agenda for high schools to pursue, each in the context of its own resources and mission, and in collaboration with the community it serves and the colleges its students seek to enter. Just as the learning outcomes develop along a continuum, so the more precise definition of the

knowledge and skills needed by college students will evolve over time and be translated into terms suitable to each case by those most directly engaged.

To those of you from countries where the school curriculum is dictated from above by either government or by university entrance requirements the process through which we at the College Board have just gone, as well as the results of the effort, could, we suppose, seem either enlightened or cumbersome. For those of us in the U.S. concerned with testing it provides an intriguing challenge. It would be easy for us simply to devise examinations focussed on the desired outcomes and let those tests determine the curriculum. But that would be dictation, which is an anathema in our non-system of education. And so we have to wait until persuasion has begun to work and then adapt our tests gradually to the slowly changing curriculum...to keep the content of our tests a bit ahead of change but not so far out in front of it as to lose contact with the realities of the classroom. It is an exciting challenge nonetheless and we look forward as always to learning from the experience of our IAEA colleagues here.